Personal Health Records

Overview

A personal health record (PHR) is a collection of your health history that is controlled by you and separate from the legal medical record maintained by your health care provider.[1, 2] It can include information about your emergency contacts, health care providers, family medical history, allergies, medications and dosage, and laboratory results, among other things.

PHRs have been traditionally maintained on paper; however, there are options for you to manage your health information electronically. An electronic PHR allows you to create and update your health information using a mobile device or desktop computer, which can make it easier to share your PHR with those involved in your care. Maintaining a PHR can help you stay engaged in your health and facilitate discussions with your provider about your health status, such as blood pressure readings and dietary habits, or results from a laboratory test.[3]

How to Create a PHR

Your health care provider may offer an option to create an electronic PHR. For example, a PHR may be available as part of your provider's patient portal, a secure website that helps you keep track of office visits, schedule appointments, request prescription refills, and more. Other options are available, some that are no cost to you. This includes PHRs such as Microsoft HealthVault, Apple Health, and Healthspek, to name a few. A listing of these PHRs and others you can choose from is available from the

American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) at: myphr.com/resources/choose.aspx.

Image from The American Nurse

Key Elements

PHRs can be as simple or as detailed based on your preference. In general, AHIMA recommends a PHR include, at a minimum, the following information[4]:

- Emergency contacts (family and/or caregivers)
- Providers involved in your care
- Dates of surgeries
- Current medications and dosages
- Immunization history
- Allergies
- Family history, including hereditary conditions
- Recent results from a physical examination
- Test results, including vision
- Dental records

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[1] Authorized family members and caregivers may be able to view and/or update your PHR on your behalf.

[2] Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC), *What is a personal health record?* Available at: www.healthit.gov/providers-professionals/faqs/what-personal-health-record.

[3] ONC, *What are the benefits of personal health records?* Available at: www.healthit.gov/providers-professionals/faqs/what-are-benefits-personal-health-records.

[4] AHIMA Personal Health Record Practice Council. "Helping Consumers Select PHRs: Questions and Considerations for Navigating an Emerging Market." Journal of AHIMA 77, no.10 (November-December 2006): 50-56. Available at: library.ahima.org/xpedio/groups/public/documents/ahima/bok1_032260.hcsp?ddocname=bok1_032260.

After you have created a PHR, it's important to keep it current to ensure your health information is accurate and up-to-date.

Privacy

PHRs offered by providers are subject to federal privacy laws under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996. Certain PHRs not governed by HIPAA have their own privacy policies and comply with other applicable laws (e.g., Federal Trade Commission). [5, 6]

Looking Ahead

Health care is evolving towards a system where consumers have greater access to their medical records. The aim is to facilitate consumers' engagement in their health and reduce health care costs. For example, the federal Blue Button 2.0 initiative allows Medicare beneficiaries to electronically access and share their health data, including treatment history.[7] Another effort is the recent upgrade to Apple Health that includes PHR functions that bring together medical records from multiple providers in one online application.

PHR adoption has been slow; at the same time, increased use of the technology suggests consumers are becoming more engaged in their health. The benefits of widespread use of electronic PHRs show promise to improve patient-provider relationships, empower patients in taking a proactive role in their health, and enhance care coordination, safety, efficiency, and quality.[8]

Resources

For more information about PHRs, consider the following resources:

- AHIMA PHR tools and resources at: myphr.com

- The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology consumer guide on PHR privacy: www.healthit.gov/sites/default/files/privacy-security/privacy-model-privacy-notice-consumer-guide-final.pdf

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[5] Office for Civil Rights, *Personal Health Records and the HIPAA Privacy Rule*. Available at: www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocr/privacy/hipaa/understanding/special/healthit/phrs.pdf.
[6] For more information about your privacy rights, visit: myphr.com/Privacy/your_privacy_rights.aspx.
[7] For more information about Blue Button 2.0, visit: bluebutton.cms.gov.
[8] Vance, B., Tomblin, B., Studeny, J., & Coustasse A. (2015, March). Benefits and barriers for adoption of personal health records. Paper presented at the 2015 Business and Health Administration Association Annual Conference at the 51st Annual Midwest Business Administration Association International Conference, Chicago, IL. Available at: mds.marshall.edu/mgmt_faculty/135/.